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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 PRETORIA 001447

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ZI](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: PROSPECTS FOR MBEKI FACILITATION IN ZIMBABWE

REF: A. 06 PRETORIA 0582

[1](#)B. 05 PRETORIA 4522

[1](#)C. CAPE TOWN 0060

[1](#)D. HARARE 0326

[1](#)E. PRETORIA 1054

[1](#)F. TRENKLE-DELL EMAIL OF 03/29/2007

Classified By: Ambassador Eric Bost. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION. As recently-appointed SADC "facilitator" for Zimbabwe, President Mbeki is off to the races but may not make it to the finish line. Mbeki has taken on Mugabe in the past and failed, and we should not underestimate Mugabe's ability to outfox him again. Nevertheless, we recommend giving Mbeki space to pursue his ultimate goal of facilitating Mugabe's retirement. Mbeki wants Mugabe replaced by a ZANU-PF-led "government of national unity," which he believes will reform the economy and open political space. At this stage, we suggest maintaining a restrained public posture on the initiative, while privately stressing the need for free and fair elections, noting our skepticism about Mugabe's intentions, and asking about "plan B" if the SADC-Mbeki initiative does not succeed. It also may be useful to encourage regional allies to engage Mbeki regularly and to support efforts by South African civil society organizations, the press, and Zimbabwean exile groups to keep the Mbeki facilitation on track.

[1](#)2. (C) This message and its recommendations draws on the conversations with Pretoria-based diplomats, South African analysts, Zimbabwean exile leaders and businessmen, and civil society organizations. Ambassador hosted a lunch April 19

with the High Commissioners from Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Canada to discuss Mbeki-SADC initiative. The envoys agreed with Post's assessment that the Mbeki initiative faces an uphill battle and were skeptical that he would succeed. Despite their concerns, they concurred that the Mbeki effort is the "only game in town," and deserves space and quiet support, at least for the time being. END SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION.

SADC Appoints South Africa as Mediator

¶3. (C) The March 28-29 Extra-Ordinary Southern African Development Community (SADC) Summit "mandated" South African President Mbeki to "continue to facilitate dialogue between the opposition and the government" in Zimbabwe. The SADC appointment is the first time that South Africa has been formally designated by the regional organization to deal with the crisis in Zimbabwe, although the SAG has tried a number of bilateral initiatives over the years, including negotiating a compromise constitution (ref A) and offering a conditional loan (ref B). The SADC blessing is important to the South Africans and may make them more aggressive than they otherwise would be. Mbeki strongly prefers to act under a multilateral mandate, even if it's largely a figleaf for SAG bilateral interests.

¶4. (C) Mbeki and his core Zimbabwe advisors -- Minister of Provincial and Local Government Sydney Mufamadi, Director General in the Presidency Frank Chikane, Presidential Legal

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Advisor Mojanku Gumbi, and Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad -- are devoting significant time and attention to Zimbabwe. The combination of the continuing economic collapse in Zimbabwe, Mugabe's brutal and public attacks on opposition leaders, the flood of millions of Zimbabweans into South Africa, and the specter of the upcoming (and potentially violent) elections in Zimbabwe have reenergized SAG diplomatic efforts. DefMin Lekota told Ambassador February 22 that the SAG was so concerned about unpredictable situation in Zimbabwe that they were keeping troops in reserve capable of responding to the situation (ref C). We also believe that South Africa wants Zimbabwe "solved" before it hosts the soccer World Cup in 2010.

Persuade Mugabe to Retire

¶5. (C) While South Africa's tactics as mediator in Zimbabwe remain murky, the SAG appears to be pursuing its strategy along two main tracks. First, we believe the SAG and ANC are intensifying behind-the-scenes efforts to persuade Mugabe to step aside before the upcoming 2008 elections. Mbeki knows that it will be difficult for Zimbabwe to hold free and fair elections -- or for the GOZ to undertake any real economic and political reform -- with Mugabe as the president and ZANU-PF candidate. Mbeki is reportedly playing with several formulas to give Mugabe a "soft landing," such as convincing him to accept a position as ceremonial president or to retain the party presidency. Other reports of the SAG's efforts to facilitate Mugabe's retirement include:

-- During the March Extra-Ordinary Summit, SADC quietly tasked Tanzanian President Kikwete to put together a package to deal with Mugabe's financial and physical security, according to IDASA analyst Sydney Masamvu. This package would deal with prosecution for crimes against humanity, retirement location, and financial guarantees for Mugabe and his family.

-- Masamvu also learned that following a meeting with former President Nelson Mandela, senior ANC leader Tokyo Sexwale called GOZ Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono on April 6

indicating that the feeling within the ANC as a party was that Mugabe should retire now (ref D).

-- We understand from several sources that the ANC is staying in close touch with the Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions of ZANU-PF -- both of whom reportedly want Mugabe gone -- looking for opportunities to influence internal ZANU-PF dynamics.

Promote Political Dialogue Leading to GNU

¶6. (C) The second track is promoting dialogue between the GOZ and opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), centered around creating conditions for free and fair elections in ¶2008. We believe Mbeki views the elections not as an end in themselves, but rather as a tool to facilitate dialogue between the government and opposition, to end the country's economic and political crisis, and to bring Zimbabwe out of its international isolation. Our sources suggest that

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Mbeki's preferred scenario is the creation of a ZANU-PF-led government of national unity (GNU), preferably before the elections, with the MDC (or at least elements thereof) working with ZANU-PF to deal with the economic crisis and to open political space before the elections. Mbeki might even recommend delaying the elections if he believes the GNU scenario is going to pan out.

¶7. (C) This formula draws heavily on South Africa's own transition experience, as well as SAG mediations in the DRC, Burundi, and Cote d'Ivoire. Mbeki's team has met the two MDC Secretaries General, Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube, twice in

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recent weeks to tease out their negotiating positions (ref E). MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett told PolOff April 19 that the South Africans gave the two officials a six-page letter from Mbeki, which Bennett characterized as a "long-winded" request for MDC views on the conditions for elections and soliciting their commitment to dialogue. (NOTE: Bennett understands that Mbeki sent Mugabe a similar letter. END NOTE.) In return, the MDC factions, largely working together on this initiative, agreed to dialogue and provided South Africa with a "Roadmap" demanding six reforms before the MDC will agree to participate in elections:

- a new constitution;
- repeal of repressive laws;
- new voter's roll;
- establishment of an independent electoral commission which is answerable to parliament and constituted in a way that "shows the diversity of Zimbabwean politics";
- demilitarization of state institutions; and,
- international supervision of elections.

MDC's Bennett also said that he believed Tsvangirai would ask for a second mediator to be added to the mix, perhaps UN-appointed, to "keep Mbeki honest." Bennett mentioned someone like former UNSYG Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who is not seen as pro-Western.

¶8. (C) The South Africans will take the MDC demands to GOZ leaders, likely Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa and perhaps to Mugabe directly. South Africa will then attempt to find middle ground between the MDC and ZANU-PF, and secure MDC's participation in the election.

Suspicious of MDC

¶9. (C) While the SAG has little choice but to engage the MDC, the SAG does not respect or trust the opposition party --

particularly the Morgan Tsvangirai-led faction -- and doubts they could govern Zimbabwe. Elements of the ANC also believe that liberation movements like ZANU-PF have an inherent right to rule. South African commentators, such as Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of the president, argue that South Africa does not want a party with labor union roots emerging as a governing party in southern Africa, since the trade union federation COSATU is one of the few threats to ANC political dominance in South Africa.

¶10. (C) The USG is viewed in South Africa as sympathetic to the MDC, particularly the Tsvangirai faction. The release of the 2007 Promoting Democracy Human Rights report, which

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described USG support for "the efforts of the political opposition," received prominent coverage on the front pages of the April 08 Sunday Times ("Americans are backing Zimbabwe's dissident groups") and April 07 Business Day Weekender ("Revelations of US meddling in Zimbabwe hurts Mbeki plan"). These reports reinforced mistaken perceptions in South Africa that the MDC is a tool of Western interests. We also understand from MDC Treasurer Bennett that Welshman Ncube complained about USG "meddling" in the internal politics of the MDC in his meeting with SAG officials (ref F). Bennett suspects that South Africa does not want close MDC-USG engagement, believing the USG might counterbalance or even undermine SAG efforts to pressure the MDC to accept compromises. (NOTE: Bennett and other sources believe that the SAG is much closer to the Mutambara MDC faction, particularly Welshman Ncube (based in part on historical links during the liberation struggle between the ANC and ZAPU), and consults them regularly. Bennett has even suggested that the SAG provides funds to the Mutambara faction, a report we have not confirmed. END NOTE.)

Destined to Fail?

¶11. (C) Given the SAG's failed attempts to resolve the Zimbabwe crisis in the past, we share the skepticism of many pundits about this new effort. Mugabe has outplayed Mbeki time after time. The SAG will be reluctant to use its economic leverage -- cutting off electricity, closing the border, or imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe -- actions they believe would further destabilize Zimbabwe.

¶12. (C) The wily Mugabe could manipulate the SADC-Mbeki initiative in a number of ways, including for example:

-- dragging out the talks by promising to meet with Mbeki and the SAG, but never making the necessary compromises;

-- making conciliatory statements while stepping up police pressure and repression against the opposition;

-- making key concessions, like repealing repressive legislation, late in the campaign season, so late that the opposition will not be able to take advantage of the "open" political space; or

-- promising to step down after the 2008 elections, but then reneging after the elections have passed.

¶13. (C) Despite our overall skepticism, we note that the new SADC-Mbeki mediation contains several new elements compared with previous SAG initiatives:

-- Mbeki believes that the SADC endorsement of South Africa's mediation gives him greater clout to take on Mugabe. Mbeki himself emphasized this point in his April 1 Financial Times interview, distinguishing the current initiative from previous ones ("this time we are acting for the region").

-- We believe Mbeki wants to "solve" the Zimbabwe issue

before he departs office in 2009, in part to enhance a legacy battered by his lack of response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and inability to deal with violent crime. True, Mugabe has

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outplayed Mbeki before, but Mbeki is a shrewd, effective diplomat who (hopefully) has learned from his past dealings with Mugabe. IDASA's Masamvu even speculated that Mbeki sought the SADC mandate because he wants to "get Bob" before he leaves power. We doubt Mbeki would have taken on the mediation role without some confidence that he could succeed.

-- The internal dynamic in Zimbabwe is different now, with strong elements within ZANU-PF opposed to Mugabe's continued rule. The SAG remains in close contact with the various ZANU-PF camps, and thus has better information about internal ZANU-PF developments and will seek ways to influence events.

-- We believe the involvement of Minister of Provincial and Local Government Sydney Mufamadi as Mbeki's point person on Zimbabwe is a positive development. Mufamadi was one of the key players in the successful DRC peace talks. He has a strong reputation as a pragmatic and effective negotiator.

-- South Africa is under increasing internal pressure to deal with the situation Zimbabwe. While there was initially sympathy for Mugabe among black South Africans in the early part of the decade, we believe this has dissipated. Editorialists and civil society groups have been fiercely critical of Mugabe in recent weeks, and skeptical of Mbeki's mediation effort. Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa (estimated between two and three million) are increasingly blamed for the country's severe crime problem and the drain on social services, adding pressure on the SAG to act.

Suggestions for U.S. Policy on Mediation

14. (C) Post recommends that the Department consider the following steps related to the South African mediation in Zimbabwe.

-- Restrained Public Posture: We suggest that the USG continue its restrained line on the Mbeki mediation, noting that we support SADC's and Mbeki's call for free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. Embracing the initiative might undermine Mbeki by enabling Mugabe to portray Mbeki as a lackey of the West. Keeping our powder dry also gives us flexibility as the initiative develops. At the Ambassador's April 19 lunch, the High Commissioners from Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Canada, unanimously agreed with this approach: giving Mbeki public space to pursue his mediation, at least for now. All, however, agreed that GOZ violence against the opposition must be condemned quickly and forcefully and will not be included as part of a "restrained" public posture.

-- Active Private Consultations/Pressure: While Post suggests maintaining a restrained public posture on the initiative, we should privately stress to SAG officials the importance of Zimbabwe holding legitimate elections in 2008. Mbeki says he supports "free and fair elections in Zimbabwe," and we should hold him to his word. We should note our skepticism about Mugabe's intentions and ask SAG officials about "plan B" if the SADC-Mbeki initiative does not succeed. There may be times when high-level USG engagement with President Mbeki and his key advisors may be useful, both to emphasize our concerns and, if the facilitation develops

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positively, to offer support.

-- Engagement with Regional Allies: We believe it may be

useful to encourage SADC and African Union leaders who have publicly expressed concern about the situation in Zimbabwe, like Ghanaian President Kufour, Zambian President Mwanawasa and Botswanan President Masire, to engage Mbeki and the SAG regularly on the regional initiative. This will help keep Mbeki "honest," as well as provide him with support.

-- Domestic Public Pressure: While the SAG likely wants the Zimbabwe issue to fade from the headlines to allow its "quiet" initiative to evolve, we believe that public pressure in South Africa is critical to keeping the initiative on track. We will continue to engage South African civil society organizations, the press, and Zimbabwean exile groups. We will also work with Embassy Harare on possible quiet funding for key advocacy initiatives.

-- Prepare to Respond: If the initiative evolves successfully, it is likely that the SAG will approach the USG, the U.K., and other Western nations to request that we respond positively to concessions by lifting (some) targeted sanctions and/or expressing public support for certain actions. The SAG will be particularly interested in what USG assistance would be available, including specific amounts and sectors, if Mugabe leaves power and reforms begin. We should be prepared to respond to these requests.

115. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Harare.
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